

Austin Jimmy Murphy - A History of the Blues

BY PETER BROWN

Austin Jimmy Murphy is a singer and guitarist originally from Syracuse, New York, now living in EL Paso, Texas, where he is Development Director for the El Paso Museum of History. Murphy spent years shuttling back and forth between Texas, upstate New York and points in between, being somewhat of a true Rambler and you can feel that in his music.

A History of the Blues is to say the least an ambitious four-CD set that lives up to its title in the sense that it is a history of Austin Jimmy Murphy's blues, featuring recordings from the '70s on up. However, in doing so, he manages to more than touch on a wide variety of blues styles and variations from the Delta to Chicago as well as East and West.

The set includes recordings in studios, living rooms, clubs and bars, with various musicians from bands to duos, trios and also solo. Murphy holds your interest by *not* sequencing it chronologically and mixing it up musically. A swing tune can be followed by a solo finger-picked bit of good time almost jug band music, which in turn is followed by an excursion into Mississippi bottleneck.

The majority of the songs are original, yet Murphy excels at making them sound like they were written decades before. Vocally, Murphy neither tries to imitate or replicate delivering everything in a straightforward manner though clearly he experiments in the studio looking for an often achieving an older and definitely funkier sound.

The musicians backing him are excellent, and this is an album where you find yourself constantly checking (the detailed) credits to see who is playing what. At the same time, no one is playing show off solos that say look how hot I am. The song always comes first, and when a solo is hot, it's because the music demands it. That said, harp players Tom Townsley and Matt Tarbell consistently stand out.

For a four CD set that runs approximately three hours, *A History of the Blues* moves surprisingly well mainly because you never know what's coming next. Murphy has a trick bag full of surprises. Only on the fourth disc do things start to slightly falter.

What Austin Jimmy Murphy understands – and what makes this set enjoyable – is that feel is all important above everything else.

Whether playing solo or with various bands or combos, softly finger-picking or ripping a lead, Murphy as has that feel down pat.

Available at: http://austinjimmymurphy.com/fr_myhome.cfm